



*"My friends, amidst  
all our differences,  
let us find a new,  
common ground."*

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*Selected Speeches of*

PRESIDENT WILLIAM JEFFERSON CLINTON

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
ON RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP AND THE AMERICAN COMMUNITY  
..... 1

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
AT OPENING OF FAMILY AND MEDIA CONFERENCE  
..... 15

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN AMERICA  
..... 18

REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION  
..... 29

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**REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
ON RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP AND THE  
AMERICAN COMMUNITY**

**Georgetown University  
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Today I want to have more of a conversation than deliver a formal speech about the great debate now raging in our nation, not so much over what we should do, but over how we should resolve the great questions of our time, here in Washington and in communities all across our country. I want to talk about the obligations of citizenship, the obligations imposed on the President and people in power, and the obligations imposed on all Americans.

Two days ago we celebrated the 219th birthday of our democracy. The Declaration of Independence was also clearly a declaration of citizenship: All men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights. Among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It was also manifestly a declaration of citizenship in a different way; it was a declaration of interdependence. For the support of this declaration with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence we mutually pledge our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor.

The distinguished American historian, Samuel Eliot Morison, in his History of the American People, wrote of these words: "These words are more revolutionary than anything written by Robespierre, Marx or Lenin; more explosive than the atom; a continual challenge to ourselves as well as an inspiration to the oppressed of all the world." What is the challenge to ourselves at the dawn of the 21st century and how shall we meet it? First of all, we must remember that the Declaration of Independence was written as a commitment for all Americans at all times, not just in time of war or great national crisis.

My argument to you is pretty straightforward. I believe we face challenges of truly historic dimensions - challenges here at home perhaps greater than any we faced since the beginning of this century we are about to finish and the dawn of the industrial era. But they are not greater challenges in their own way than the ones we faced at our birth, greater challenges than those of slavery and civil war, greater than those of World War I or the Depression or World War II. And they can be solved, though they are profound. What are they?

Most people my age grew up in an America dominated by middle class dreams and middle class values - the life we wanted to live and the kind of people we wanted to be; dreams that inspired those who were born into the middle class; dreams that sustained and directed the lives of those who were much more successful and more powerful; dreams that animated the strivings of those who were poor because of the condition of their birth or because they came here as immigrants; middle class dreams that there would be reward for work and that the future of our children would be better than the lives we enjoyed. Middle class values, strong families and faith, safe streets, secure futures.

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These things are very much threatened today, threatened by 20 years of stagnant incomes, of harder work by good Americans for the same or lower pay, of increasing inequality of incomes, and increasing insecurity in jobs and retirement and health care.

They are threatened by 30 years of social problems of profound implications – family break-ups, of a rising tide of violence and drugs, of declining birth rates among successful, married couples, and rising birth rates among young people who are not married. They are threatened by the failure of public institutions to respond; the failure of bureaucracies encrusted in yesterday's prerogatives and not meeting the challenges of today and tomorrow – the schools, the law enforcement agencies, the governments and their economic and other policies. They are threatened by the sheer pace and scope of change as technology and ideas and money and decisions move across the globe at breathtaking rates, and every great opportunity seems to carry within it the seeds of a great problem.

As a result, we have anomalies everywhere: Abroad, the Cold War ends, but we see the rise and the threat of technology-based destruction – sarin gas exploding in the subway in Japan, the bomb exploding in Oklahoma City. The Soviet Union is no more, and so they worry now in the Baltics about becoming a conduit for drug trafficking, and they worry in Russia about their banks being taken over by organized crime.

And here at home, it all seems so confusing – the highest growth rates in a decades, the stock market at an all-time high, almost 7 million more jobs, more millionaires and new businesses than ever before, but most people working harder for less and feeling more insecure.

I saw it just the other day in this cartoon, which you probably can't see, but I'll read it to you. There's a politician – maybe it's supposed to be me – up here giving a speech at a banquet, one of those interminable banquets we all attend. And here's the waiter serving one of the attendees. The politician says: "The current recovery has created over 7.8 million jobs." The waiter says: "And I've got three of them."

In 1991, as Father O'Donovan said, I came here to Georgetown to talk about these challenges and to lay out my philosophy about how we as a people – not just as a government, but as a people – ought to meet them. I called it the New Covenant. I will repeat briefly what I said then because I don't believe I can do any better today than I did then in terms of what I honestly believe we ought to be doing.

I think we have to create more opportunity and demand more responsibility. I think we have to give citizens more say and provide them a more responsive, less bureaucratic government. I think we have to do these things because we are literally a community – an American family that is going up or down together, whether we like it or not. If we're going to have middle class dreams and middle class values, we have to do things as private citizens and we have to do things in partnership through our public agencies and through our other associations.

In 1994, when the Republicans won a majority in Congress, they offered a different view which they called their Contract With America. In their view most of our problems were personal

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and cultural; the government tended to make them worse because it was bureaucratic and wedded to the past and more interested in regulating and choking off the free enterprise system; and, therefore, what we should do is to balance the budget as soon as possible, cut taxes as much as possible, deregulate business completely if possible, and cut our investments in things like welfare as much as possible.

As you know, I thought there were different things that ought to be done because I believed in partnership. I believed in supporting community initiatives that were working, preventing things before they happened instead of just punishing bad behavior after it occurred, and in trying to empower people to make the most of their own lives. So I believed that there were things we could do here in Washington to help, whether it was family leave, or tougher child support enforcement, or reforming the pension system to save the pensions of over 8 million American workers, or investing more in education and making college more affordable.

What I believe grows largely out of my personal history and a lot of it happened to me a long time before I came to Georgetown and read in books things that made me convinced that I was basically right. I grew up in a small town in a poor state. When I was born at the end of World War II, my state's per capita income was barely half the national average. I was the first person in my family to go to college. When I was a boy I lived for a while on a farm without an indoor toilet. It makes a good story – not as good as being born in a log cabin, but it's true.

I had a stepfather without a high school diploma and a grandfather, whom I loved above all people almost, who had a sixth-grade education. I lived in a segregated society, and I lived in a family, as has now been well-documented, with problems of alcohol and later, drug abuse. I learned a lot about what I call the New Covenant, about the importance of responsibility and opportunity.

I lived in a family where everybody worked hard and where kids were expected to study hard. But I also had a lot of opportunity that was given to me by my community. I had good teachers and good schools. And when I needed them, I got scholarships and jobs. I saw what happened to good people who had no opportunity because they happened to be black, or because they happened to be poor and white and isolated in the hills and hollows of the mountains of my state.

I saw what happened in my own family to people who were good people, but didn't behave responsibly. My stepfather was very responsible toward me, but not very responsible toward himself. Anybody who's ever lived in a family with an alcoholic knows that there is nothing you can do for somebody else that they are not prepared to do for themselves. And my brother – after all of his struggles with drug addiction, which included even serving some time in jail, I am sometimes more proud of him than I am of what I've done because he has a family and a son and a life – not because of the love and support that we all gave him, but because of what he did for himself.

So my whole political philosophy is basically rooted in what I think works. It works for families and communities, and it worked pretty well for our country for a long time.

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If you look at recent American history, our country has never been perfect, because none of us are, but we did always seem to be going in the right direction.

I remember when I was a boy in the '50s and '60s - I remember like it was yesterday when I graduated from high school in 1964, and we had about three-percent unemployment, about three or four-percent real growth, and very modest inflation. And we all just assumed that the American Dream would work out all right if we could ever whip racism. If we could just whip that and make sure all poor people had a chance to work their way into the middle class, we could just almost put this country on automatic. I know that's hard to believe, but that's basically what we thought back then. If we could just somehow lift this awful racial burden off our shoulders and learn how to live together, we could just roll on.

And then in the '60s and the '70s and the '80s, the results got a lot more mixed. Contrary to what a lot of people say now in retrospect, the '60s were not all bad. A lot of good things happened. A lot of people passionately believed that they had a responsibility to help one another achieve the fullest of their God-given potential. And a lot of the important advances in civil rights, in education and in fighting poverty really made a difference. But it was also a time when many people began to have such profound cultural clashes that more and more people dropped out and became more self-indulgent.

Contrary to popular retrospection, a lot of good things happened in the '70s. We made a national commitment as a country to defend our environment. This is a safer, cleaner, healthier place because of what we've done for the last 25 years. We decided in a bipartisan way that the workplace ought to be safer, that too many people were dying in the workplace. If any of you have ever spent any time in a factory, seen people walking around without all their fingers, you can appreciate that.

But it was also a time when we became profoundly disillusioned because of Watergate and a lot of other things. We really began to suspect that we couldn't trust our leaders or our institutions. And it was the beginning of the decline of middle class dreams for middle class people. In the '60s, the riots in the cities showed that more and more poor people began to doubt whether they would ever be able to work their way into the middle class. In the '70s, people who were in the middle class began to worry about whether they would ever be able to stay or what that meant. It began 20 years ago.

Then in the '80s, it was also a very mixed bag. It was a time when people exalted greed and short-term profit. It was a time when we built in, by bipartisan conspiracy in this community, the first structural deficit in the history of the United States of America, and exploded our debt while we were reducing our investment in our most profound problems, while we spent the tax cuts and behaved just like the rest of the country, worrying about the short-run. But it was also a time, let's not forget, where all across the country, there was a renewed awareness of the dangers of drugs and drug use began to go down, smoking declined, volunteerism increased. And there was a remarkable explosion of productivity in the industrial sector in America, and the American economy began to go through the changes necessary to be competitive.

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In the '90s, everybody knows, I think, that there's been a sort of a sobering increase in personal values of commitment. You see it in the decline in the divorce rate and the increase in healthy habits among many people. You see more commitment expressed in groups and by individuals all across the country. You see it in people reaffirming their commitment to the families in small and large ways: The remarkable husband and wife minister team that I introduced in the State of the Union, the Reverend Cherrys and their AME Zion Church near here, now one of the two or three biggest churches in America, founded on family outreach; the phenomenal success of this promise-keepers organization - you can fill any football stadium in America. It's an astonishing thing because people want to do the right thing. And they want to get their families and their lives back together. And that's encouraging.

But let us not forget that these profound problems endure. Middle class dreams and middle class values, the things which have shaped our life and our experience and our expectations, are still very, very much at risk.

I will say again: We have all these aggregate indices that the economy has done well - almost 7 million new jobs, the stock market's over 4,500. All the things that you know. But while average income has gone up, median income, the person in the middle, has declined in the last two years. A sense of job security has declined with all the downsizing. More and more people are temporary workers. This is the only advanced country in the world where there's a smaller percentage of people under 65 in the work force with health insurance today than there was 10 years ago.

Millions of American people go home at night from their work and sit down to dinner and look at their children and wonder what they have done wrong, what did they ever do to fail. And they're riddled with worries about it. Millions more who are poor have simply given up on ever being able to work their way into a stable lifestyle. And that, doubtless, is fueling some of the disturbing increase in casual drug use among very young people and the rise in violence among young people.

That threatens middle class values. In almost every major city in America the crime rate is down - hallelujah. In almost every place in America, the rate of random violence among young people is up, even as the overall crime rate drops. Government is struggling to change, and I'm proud of the changes we have made. But no one really believes that government is fully adjusted to the demands of the 21st century and the information age. It clearly must still be less bureaucratic, more empowering and rely more on incentives. We still have to reduce spending and we have to find a way to do it while increasing our investment in the things that will determine our ability to live the middle class dreams.

Politics has become more and more fractured and pluralized, just like the rest of our lives. It's exciting in some ways. But as we divide into more and more sharply defined organized groups around more and more stratified issues, as we communicate more and more with people in extreme rhetoric through mass mailings or sometimes semi-hysterical messages right before election on the telephone, or 30-second ads designed far more to inflame than to inform, as we see politicians actually getting language lessons on how to turn their adversaries into aliens, it is difficult to draw

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the conclusion that our political system is producing the sort of discussion that will give us the kind of results we need.

But our citizens, even though their confidence in the future has been clouded and their doubts about their leaders and their institutions are profound, want something better. You could see it in the way they turned out for the town meetings in 1992. You could see it in the overwhelming, I mean literally overwhelming, response that I have received from people of all political parties to the simple act of having a decent, open conversation with the Speaker of the House in Claremont, New Hampshire. People know we need to do better. And deep down inside, our people know this is a very great country capable of meeting our challenges.

So what are the conclusions I draw from this? First of all, don't kid yourself. There are real reasons for ordinary voters to be angry, frustrated and downright disoriented. How could our politics not be confusing when people's lives are so confusing and frustrating and seem to be so full of contradictory developments?

Secondly, this is now, as it has ever been, fertile ground for groups that claim a monopoly on middle class values and old-fashioned virtue. And it's easy to blame the government when people don't feel any positive results. It's easy to blame groups of others when people have to have somebody to blame for their own problems when they are working as hard as they can, and they can't keep up.

But there is real reason for hope, my fellow Americans. This is, after all, the most productive country in the world. We do a better job of dealing with racial and ethnic diversity and trying to find some way to bring out the best in all of our people than any other country with this much diversity in the world.

We have an environment that is cleaner and safer and healthier than it used to be. We still have the lead in many important areas that will determine the shape of societies in the 21st century. There is a real willingness among our people to try bold change. And, most important of all, most Americans are still living by middle class values and hanging on to middle class dreams. And everywhere in this country there are examples of people who have taken their future into their own hands, worked with their friends and neighbors, broken through bureaucracy and solved problems. If there is anything I would say to you it is this: You can find somewhere in America somebody who has solved every problem you are worried about.

So there is reason for hope. And I would say, to me, the real heroes in this country are the people that are out there making things work and the people who show up for work every day, even though they're barely at and maybe even below the poverty line, but they still work full-time, obey the law, pay their taxes and raise their kids the best they can. That's what this country is really all about. And so there is really no cause for the kind of hand-wringing and cynicism that dominates too much of the public debate today.

What do we have to do now? First of all, we've got to have this debate that is looming over Washington. We have to have it. It's a good thing. We are debating things now we thought

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were settled for decades. We are now back to fundamental issues that were debated like this 50, 60, 70 years ago. There is a group who believe that our problems are primarily personal and cultural. Cultural is basically a word that means, in this context, that there are a whole lot of persons doing the same bad thing. And then if everybody would just sort of straighten up and fly right, why, things would be hunky-dory. And why don't they do it?

I'll give you two examples. And I made you laugh, but let's be serious -- these people are honest and genuine in their beliefs. I will give you two examples that stand out, but there are hundred more that are more modulated.

First is the NRA's position on gun violence, the Brady Bill and the assault weapons ban. Their position is guns don't kill people, people do; find the people who do wrong, throw them in jail and throw the key away. Punish wrongdoers. Do not infringe upon my right to keep and bear arms, even to keep and bear arsenals or artillery or assault weapons. Do not do that because I have not done anything wrong and I have no intention of doing anything wrong. Why are you making me wait five days to get a handgun? What do you care if I want an AK-47 or an Uzi to go out and engage in some sort of sporting contest to see who's a better shot? I obey the law. I pay my taxes. I don't give you any grief. Why are you on my back? The Constitution says I can do this. Punish wrongdoers. I am sick and tired of my life being inconvenienced for what other people do.

The second example is the one that dominated the headlines in the last couple of days, what Senator Helms said about AIDS: I'm sick and tired of spending money on research and treatment for a disease that could be ended tomorrow if everybody would just straighten up and fly right. I'm tired of it. Why should I spend taxpayer money -- I've got a budget to balance. We're cutting aid to Africa. We're cutting education. We're cutting Medicare. Why should we spend money on treatment and research for a disease that is a product of people's wrongdoing? Illicit sex and bad drugs, dirty needles -- let's just stop it.

Now, at one level, forgetting about those two examples, this argument is self-evidently right. Go back to what I told you about my family. A lot of you are nodding your heads about yours. There is a sense in which there is nothing the government can do for anybody that will displace the negative impact of personal misconduct. And unless people are willing to work hard and do the best they can and advance themselves and their families, the ability of common action, no matter how well-meaning, won't work.

You look at every social program that's working in every community -- and there are lots of them. I was just in New Haven for the opening of the Special Olympics, and I spent a lot of time with the LEAP Program up there. It's an incredible program where these college students work with inner-city kids in the cities helping them rebuild their lives. But if the kids don't want to do it and won't behave, there's nothing these college kids can do to help them. So let's give them that. At a certain level, this is self-evidently true.

But what is the problem? These problems are our problems. They're not just single problems. If there's a big crime rate and a whole lot of people getting killed with guns, that affects all the rest of us because some of us are likely to get shot.

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Now, I see the Brady Bill in a totally different way because I see these problems as community problems. And I think a public response is all right. And I think saying to people who have the line I said, I think we ought to say to them, "Look, it is just not out of line for you to be asked to undergo the minor inconvenience of waiting five days to get a handgun, until we can computerize all the records – because, look here, in the last year and a half, there are 40,000 people who had criminal records or mental health histories who didn't get handguns, and they're not out there shooting people because you went through a minor inconvenience. You don't gripe when you go through a metal detector at an airport anymore, because you are very aware of the connection between this minor inconvenience to you and the fact that that plane might blow up, and you don't want that plane to blow up or be hijacked."

Look at the level of violence in America. It's the same thing. I don't have a problem with saying, "Look, these assault weapons are primarily designed to kill people. That's their primary purpose. And I'm sorry if you don't have a new one that you can take out in the woods somewhere, to a shooting contest, but you'll get over it. Shoot with something else. It's worth it." I'm glad you're clapping. I'm glad you agree with me, but remember, the other people are good people who honestly believe what they say. That's the importance of this debate. It's the attitudes. That's why we're having this debate.

The NRA that I knew as a child, the NRA that I knew as a governor, for years, were the people who did hunter education programs, the people who helped me resolve land boundary disputes when retirees would come to the mountains in the northern part of my state and go into unincorporated areas, disputes about who could and couldn't hunt on whose land. And they actually helped save people's lives and they solved a lot of problems. But this is a different time and group. These are deeply held world views about the way things work, but the way I look at it is it's like the airport metal detector.

I'll give you another example. It might not be popular in this group. I agree with the Supreme Court decision on requiring people who want to be on high school athletic teams to take drug tests – not because I think all kids are bad, not because I think they all use drugs, but because casual drug use is going up among young people again. It is a privilege to play on the football team. It is a privilege to be in the band. It is a privilege to have access to all these activities. And I say it's like going through the airport metal detector – you ought to be willing to do that to help get the scourge of drugs out of your school and keep kids off drugs. That's what I believe, because I see it as a common problem. So we all have to give up a little and go through a little inconvenience to help solve problems and pull the country together and push it forward. But this is a huge debate.

Look at the AIDS debate. You may think it's a little harder. First of all, the truth is not everybody who has AIDS gets it from sex or drug needles. I've got a picture on my desk at the White House of a little boy named Ricky Ray. He and his family were treated horribly by people who were afraid of AIDS when he and his brother first got it through blood transfusions. He died right after my election. I keep his picture on my table to remember that.

Elizabeth Glaser was a good friend of mine. She and the daughter she lost and her wonderful son that survived her, they didn't get AIDS through misconduct. So that's just wrong.

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I know a fine woman doctor in Texas who got AIDS because she was treating AIDS patients and she got the tiniest pinprick in her finger – a million to one, two million to one chance. But, secondly, and more to the point, the gay people who have AIDS are still our sons, our brothers, our cousins, our citizens. They're Americans, too. They're obeying the law and working hard. They're entitled to be treated like everybody else.

As for drug users, there's nobody in this country that hates that any more than I do because I've lived with it in my family. But I fail to see why we would want to hasten people's demise because they paid a terrible price for their abuse.

You know, smoking causes lung cancer, but we don't propose to stop treating lung cancer or stop doing research to find a cure. Right? Drunk driving causes a lot of highway deaths, but we don't propose to stop trying to make cars safer. Do we? I don't think so.

So I just disagree with this. Why do we have to make this choice? Why can't we say to people, look, you've got to behave if you want your life to work, but we have common problems and we are going to have some common responses. I don't understand why it's got to be an either-or thing. That's not the way we live our lives. Why should we conduct our public debates in this way?

The best example of all to me that our problems are both personal and cultural and economic, political and social is the whole condition of the middle class economically. I think it requires public and private decision-making and family values. Most families have them. But most families are working harder for less so they have less time and less money to spend with their children. Now, that's just a fact. That's not good for family values. And I don't believe exhortation alone can turn it around. It's going to require some common action. I think that what we did with the family leave law supported family values. I think that we can have a welfare reform law that requires parental responsibility, has tough work requirements, but invests in child care and supports family values.

I think we can have a tax system that gives breaks to people to help them raise their kids and educate themselves and their children. That would support family values. I think we can have an education system that empowers people to make the most of their own lives, and I think that is profoundly supportive of family values. And I do not believe the government can do it alone. I believe there are other things that have to be done by people themselves and also by employers.

One of our major newspapers had an article the other day on the front page, saying that in the new world economy the employers call all the shots, talking about how more and more workers were temporary workers, more and more people felt insecure.

You know, it's all very well to exhort people. But if they're out there really busting it, doing everything they can and falling further behind, and they're not being treated fairly by people who can afford to treat them fairly, then that's something else again, isn't it?



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The global economy, automation, the decline of unionization, and the inadequate response of too many employers to these changes have led to a profound weakening of the condition of many American workers. There aren't many companies like NUCOR, a nonunion company, a steel company, where people get a fairly low base hourly wage, but they get a weekly bonus; nobody's ever been laid off, every employee with a child who's college age gets about \$2,500 a year as a college allowance; and the pay of the executives is tied to the performance of the company and cannot go up by a higher percentage than the pay of the workers goes up.

Now, by contrast, in the 12 years before I took office – this is all in the private sector – the top management of our companies' pay went up by four times the percentage their workers' pay went up and three times what their profits went up. And that trend has largely continued, or, if anything, accelerated, even though we limited the tax subsidy for it in 1993.

So I would say to you that there are some things that mere exhortation to good conduct will not solve, that require other responses that are public or that are private but go beyond just saying these are personal or cultural problems.

I also think that if we want to maintain a public response, there must be a relentless effort to change but not to eviscerate the government. We have tried weak government, nonexistent government, in a complex industrial society where powerful interests that are driven only by short-term considerations call all the shots. We tried it decades and decades ago. It didn't work out very well. It didn't even produce a very good economic policy. It had something to do with the onset of the Depression.

On the other hand, we know that an insensitive, overly bureaucratic, yesterday-oriented, special-interest-dominated government can be just as big a nightmare. We've done what we could to change that. The government has 150,000 fewer people working today than it did when I took office. We've gotten rid of thousands of regulations and hundreds of programs. We have a few shining stars like the Small Business Administration, which today has a budget that's 40 percent lower than it did when I took office, that's making twice as many loans, has dramatically increased the loans to women and minorities, has not decreased loans to white males and hasn't made a loan to a single unqualified person.

We can do these things. I wish I had all day to talk to you about what the Secretary of Education has done in the Education Department to try to make it work better and make common sense, and involve parents, and promote things like greater choice of schools and the building of charter schools and character education in the schools. It's not an either-or thing. You don't have to choose between being personally right and having common goals.

So that's my side of the argument. That's why I think my New Covenant formulation is better to solve the problems of middle class dreams and middle class values than the Republican Contract. But perhaps the most important thing is not whether I'm right or they are, the important thing is how are we going to resolve this and what are citizens going to do in resolving the debate.



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I believe – and you've got to decide whether you believe this – I believe that a democracy requires a certain amount of common ground. I do not believe you can solve complex questions like this at the grass-roots level or at the national level or anywhere in between if you have too much extremism of rhetoric and excessive partisanship. Times are changing too fast. We need to keep our eyes open. We need to keep our ears open.

We need to be flexible. We need to have new solutions based on old values. I just don't think we can get there unless we can establish some common ground.

And that seems to me to impose certain specific responsibilities on citizens and on political leaders. And if I might, just let me say them. They may be painfully self-evident, but I don't think they're irrelevant. Every citizen in this country's got to say, "What do I have to do for myself or my family, or nothing else counts." The truth is that nobody can repeal the laws of the global economy, and people that don't have a certain level of education and skills are not going to be employable in good jobs with long-term prospects. And that's just a fact.

The truth is that if every child in this country had both parents contributing to his or her support and nourishment and emotional stability and education and future, we'd have almost no poor kids, instead of having over 20 percent of our children born in poverty. Those things are true.

The second thing is, more of our citizens have got to say, "What should I do in my community?" You know, it's not just enough to bemoan the rising crime rate or how kids are behaving and whatever – that's just not enough. It is not enough. Not when you have example after example after example from this LEAP Program I mentioned, the "I Have a Dream" Program, to the world-famous Habitat for Humanity Program, to all these local initiatives and support corporations that are now going around the country, revolutionizing slum housing and giving poor, working people decent places to live; to the work of the Catholic social missions in Washington, D.C., and other places.

It is not enough to say that. People have to ask themselves: What should I be doing through my church or my community organizations? People who feel very strongly about one of the most contentious issues in our society, abortion, ought to look at the United Pentecostal Church. They'll adopt any child born, no matter what race, no matter how disabled, no matter what their problems are. There is a positive, constructive outlet for people who are worried about every problem in this country if they will go seek it out. And there is nothing the rest of us can do that will replace that kind of energy.

The third thing I think citizens have to do that is also important is to say, "What is my job as a citizen who is a voter? I am in control here. I run the store. I get to throw this crowd out on a regular basis." That's a big responsibility. We're the board of directors of America. Are we making good decisions? Do we approach these decisions in the right frame of mind? Do we have enough information? Do we know what we're doing? I can tell you, the American people are hungry for information. When I announced my balanced budget and we put it on the Internet, one of our people at the White House told me there were a few hours when we were getting 50,000 requests an hour. The American people want to know things.

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So I say to every citizen, do you have the information you need? Do you ever have a discussion with somebody that's different from you? Not just people who agree with you but somebody who's different. Do you ever listen to one of those radio programs that has the opposite point of view of yours, even if you have to grind your teeth? And what kind of language do you use when you talk to people who are of different political parties with different views? Is it the language of respect or the language of a suspect? How do you deal with people? This is a huge thing. What do you have to do for yourself and your family? What can you do in your community? What can you do as a citizen?

Thomas Jefferson said he had no fear of the most extreme views in America being expressed with the greatest passion as long as reason had a chance. As long as reason had a chance. Citizens have to give reason a chance.

What do the political leaders have to do? I would argue four things. Number one, we need more conversation and less combat. Number two, when we differ we ought to offer an alternative. Number three, we ought to look relentlessly at the long-term and remind the American people that the problems we have developed over a long period of years. And, number four, we shouldn't just berate the worst in America, we ought to spend more time celebrating the best.

Those are four things that I think I should do and I think every other leader in this country ought to do. Conversation, not combat is what I tried to do with the Speaker in New Hampshire, and I want to do more of it with others. I'm willing if they are. I think it would be good for America.

Secondly, differ, but present an alternative. That's why I presented a balanced budget. A lot of people said, "This is dumb politics. The Republicans won the Congress by just saying no: No to deficit reduction, and call it a tax increase. Run away from your own health care plan, say they're trying to make the government take over health care." That may be. But that's because this is a confusing time. It's still not the right thing to do.

Americans don't want "just say no" politics. If they can get the truth, they'll make the right decision 99 times out of 100. And we have to offer an alternative. And so do they. We all should. When we differ, we should say what we're for, not just what we're against.

The third thing is important - looking for the long-term. I was really sad in 1994. I'll be honest with you, on Election Day I was sad. I kind of felt sorry for myself - I thought, gosh, you know, the real problems in this country are these income problems, and look what we've done with the family leave law; we cut taxes for families with incomes under \$28,000 a year by \$1,000 a year; we've done - and I reeled it all off. And I said, gosh, I feel terrible. And then I realized, how could they possibly feel anything in two years? These income trends are huge, huge trends, sweeping over two decades, with vast international forces behind them. Trillions of dollars of money move across international borders working to find the lowest labor cost and pressing down. Untold improvements in automation have come so fast that you just can't create enough high-wage jobs to overcome the ones that are being depressed in some sectors of the economy. These are a huge deal. How could people have felt that?

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Nonetheless, our job is not to get reelected, it's to think about the long-term because the problems are long-term problems.

I want to read you what President Havel said in his Harvard commencement speech about this, in speech more eloquent than anything I could say. "The main task of the present generation of politicians is not, I think, to ingratiate themselves with the public through the decisions they take or their smiles on television. Their role is something quite different -- to assume their share of responsibility for the long-range prospects of our world, and thus, to set an example for the public in whose sight they work. After all, politics is a matter of serving the community, which means that it is morality in practice." I could hardly have said it better.

Fourth, and maybe the most important thing is, we should not just condemn the worst, we ought to find the best and celebrate it, and then relentlessly promote it as a model to be followed. You know, I kept President Bush's Points of Light Foundation when I became President. And we recognize those people every year because I believe in that. I always thought that was one of the best things he did, but I tried to institutionalize it in many ways.

That's what AmeriCorps is all about. The national service program gives young people a chance to earn money for college by working in grass-roots community projects all across the country. When I was in New Haven at the LEAP Program, I had AmeriCorps volunteers there. I was in Texas the other day walking the streets of an inner city and a girl with a college degree from another state was there working with welfare mothers because she was raised by a welfare mother who taught her to go to school, work hard, and get a college degree, and she did.

We have to find a way to systematically see these things that work sweep across this country with high standards and high expectations and break through all this bureaucracy that keeps people from achieving. We can do that. And the President ought to do even more than I have done to celebrate the things that work, and I intend to do it and to do more of it.

Now, I believe, obviously, that my New Covenant approach is better than the Republican Contract approach to deal with the problems of middle class dreams and middle class values. But when I ran for this job I said I wanted to restore the American Dream and to bring the American people together. I have now come to the conclusion, having watched this drama unfold here and all around our country in the last two and a half years, that I cannot do the first unless we can do the latter. We can't restore the American Dream unless we can find some way to bring the American people closer together. Therefore, how we resolve these differences is as important as what specific position we advocate.

I think we have got to move beyond division and resentment to common ground. We've got to go beyond cynicism to a sense of possibility. America is an idea. We're not one race. We're not one ethnic group. We're not one religious group. We do share a common piece of ground here. But you read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and you'll find that this country is an idea. And it is still going now in our 220th year because we all had a sense of possibility. We never thought there was a mountain we couldn't climb, a river we couldn't ford, or a problem we couldn't solve.

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Like that great line in the wonderful new movie, Apollo 13, "Failure is not an option." You have to believe in possibility. And if you're cynical, you can't believe in possibility.

We need to respect our differences and hear them, but it means instead of having shrill voices of discord, we need a chorus of harmony. In a chorus of harmony you know there are lots of differences, but you can hear all the voices. And that is important.

And we've got to challenge every American in every sector of our society to do their part. We have to challenge in a positive way and hold accountable people who claim to be not responsible for any consequences of their actions that they did not specifically intend - whether it's in government, business, labor, entertainment, the media, religion or community organizations. None of us can say we're not accountable for our actions because we did not intend those consequences, even if we made some contribution to them.

Two day ago, on July the 4th, the people of Oklahoma City raised their flags and their spirits to full mast for the first time since the awful tragedy of April 19th. Governor Keating and Mayor Norick led a celebration in Oklahoma City, which some of you may have seen on television; a celebration of honor and thanks for thousands of Oklahomans and other Americans who showed up and stood united in the face of that awful hatred and loss, stood for what is best in our country.

You know, Oklahoma City took a lot of the meanness out of America. It gave us a chance for more sober reflection. It gave us a chance to come to the same conclusion that Thomas Jefferson did in his first inaugural. I want to read this to you with only this bit of history: Thomas Jefferson was elected the first time by the House of Representatives in a bitterly contested election in the first outbreak of completely excessive partisanship in American history. In that sense it was a time not unlike this time. And this is what he said: "Let us unite with our heart and mind. Let us restore to social intercourse that harmony and affection without which liberty and life itself are but dreary things."

We can redeem the promise of America for our children. We can certainly restore the American family for another full century if we commit to each other, as the founders did, our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor. In our hour of the greatest peril and the greatest division when we were fighting over the issue which we still have not fully resolved, Abraham Lincoln said, "We are not enemies but friends. We must not be enemies."

My friends, amidst all our differences, let us find a new, common ground. Thank you very much.



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**REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
AT OPENING OF FAMILY AND MEDIA CONFERENCE**

**Tennessee Performing Arts Center  
Nashville, Tennessee  
July 10, 1995**

Thank you very much. I thought it might be nice to stop by here after having done my primary duty which was delivering the soup to Mrs. Gore. I'm delighted to be here, Governor, Mayor, Senator, members of Congress. To Representative Purcell and the other distinguished members of the Tennessee legislature who are here, Dr. Erickson and to all of you, let me say that I came here primarily to listen. And I find that I always learn a lot more when I'm listening than when I'm talking, so I will be quite brief.

I want to say a few things, however. First, I want to thank Al and Tipper Gore for their lifetime of devotion not only to their family, but to the families of this state and this nation, as manifested by this Family Reunion, the fourth such one, something they have done in a careful and sustained way. It's already been mentioned twice that Tipper has worked on the whole issue that we're here to discuss today for many, many years, never in the context of politics, but always in the context of what's good for families and what we can do to move the ball forward for our children and for our future. And I think this country owes them a great debt of gratitude. And I'm glad to be here.

Secondly, I'd just like to frame this issue as it appears to me as President and as a parent. I gave a speech at Georgetown a few days ago in which I pointed out that the world in which I grew up, the world after World War II, was basically shaped by two great ideas -- the middle-class dream that if you work hard you'll get ahead and your kids can do better than you did; and middle-class values found in a family and community and responsibility and trustworthiness, and that both of those things were at some considerable risk today as we move out of the Cold War into the global economy and the whole way we live and work is subject to sweeping challenge.

The family is the focus of both middle-class dreams and middle-class values, for it is the center around which we organize child rearing -- our country's most important responsibility -- and work. And how we work determines how we live and what will become of us over the long run.

We have seen enormous changes in both work and child rearing in the last several years. We know now that a much higher percentage of our children live in poverty, particularly in the last 10 years, even as we have the percentage of elderly people in poverty going below that of the general population for the first time in history -- a considerable achievement of which we ought to be proud as a country. But still, our children are becoming more and more poor.

We know that a higher percentage of our children are being born out of wedlock. What you may not know, but is worth noting, is that the number of children being born out of wedlock is more or less constant for the last few years. So we not only have too many children being born

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out of wedlock, we have more and more young couples where both of them are working and having careers who are deferring child bearing and, in many cases, not having children at all. That is also a very troubling thing in our country - the people in the best position to build strong families and bring up kids in a good way deciding not to do so.

We know that most children live in families where, whether they have one parent or two parents in the home, whoever their parents are in the home are also working. We know that we do less for child care and for supervised care for children as a society than any other advanced country in the world.

We know, too, that most of our parents for the last 20 years have been working a longer work week for the same or lower wages, so that while Representative Purcell here complimented the Governor on his budget because it maintained a commitment to children in terms of public investment, you could make a compelling argument that the private investment in children has been going down because most families have both less time and less money to spend on their children.

And we know that as parents spend less time with their children, by definition the children are spending more time with someone or something else, so that the media has not only exploded in its ramifications in our life, but also has more access to more of our children's time than would have been the case 20 years ago if all these technological developments had occurred when the family and our economy were in a different place.

And I think we have to look at all these issues in that context. Now, it's commonplace to say that most of us believe that there's too much indiscriminate violence, too much indiscriminate sex and too much callous degradation of women and sometimes of other people in various parts of our media today. I believe that the question is, "So what?" What we ought to be talking about today is, so what are we all going to do about that? Because our ability to change things, I think, consists most importantly in our ability to take affirmative steps.

At this talk at Georgetown, I made a commitment that I would try to set an example for what I thought our political leaders ought to be doing. We ought to have more conversation and less combat. When we criticize, we ought to offer an alternative. We ought to be thinking about the long run - these trends that we're dealing with have been developing over quite a long while now. And we ought to celebrate what is good, as well as condemn what we don't like. And I think if we do those four things, then we will be able to make good decisions.

So let me just make two specific suggestions and then I'd like to get on with listening to other people. First of all, in the spirit of alternatives and celebrating what is good, I'm for balancing the budget, but I'm against getting rid of public television or dramatically cutting it. In our family this is known as the "leave Big Bird alone" campaign. I say that because we are going to have to cut a bunch of stuff, folks, and we are going to have to cut a lot of things. The budget would be in balance today but for the interest were paying on the debt run up between 1981 and 1993. Next year, interest on the debt will exceed the defense budget. This is a big problem for our families, their incomes, their living standards, their future.

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But consider this. Public TV gives, on average, six hours of educational programming a day. Sometimes the networks have as little as a half an hour a week. Public television goes to 98 percent of our homes. Forty percent of our people don't have access to cable channels like the Learning Channel or A&E. Only fourteen percent of overall public television channel funding comes from federal money, but often times in rural places, like Senator Conrad's North Dakota, over half of the money comes from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. Sixty percent of the viewers have family incomes below \$40,000. It costs you a \$1.09 a year, per citizen, to fund it. And for every dollar public television and radio get from the government, they raise \$5 or \$6 from the private sector. So I think that's my first suggestion.

My second suggestion relates to the presence of Senator Conrad here. If we don't believe in censorship, and we do want to tell parents that they have a responsibility - that television, to use Reverend Jackson's phrase that the Vice President mentioned, may be the "third parent," but it can't be the first or the second, and that's up to the parents - if we want to say that, but we know we live in a country where most kids live in families where there are one or two parents that are working, and where we have less comprehensive child care than any other advanced country in the world, the question is how can we get beyond telling parents to do something that they physically cannot do for several hours a day unless they literally do want to be a home without television, or monitor their kids in some other way.

There is one technological fix now being debated in the Congress which I think is very important - it's a little, simple thing; I think it's a very big deal. In the telecommunications bill, Senator Conrad offered an amendment which ultimately passed with almost three-quarters of the Senate voting for it. So it's a bipartisan proposal that would permit a so-called V-chip to be put in televisions with cables which would allow parents to decide not only which channels their children could not watch, but within channels, to block certain programming.

This is not censorship, this is parental responsibility. This is giving parents the same access to the technology that is coming into your home to all the people who live there who turn it on. So I would say, when that telecommunications bill is ultimately sent to the President's desk, put the V-chip in it and empower the parents who have to work to do their part to be responsible with media. Those are two specific suggestions that I hope will move this debate forward.

Having said what I mean to say, I would like to now go on, Mr. Vice President, to hear the people who really know something about this. I want to thank you all for your care and concern. And let me echo something the Governor said: There is a huge consensus in this country today that we need to do something that is responsible, that is constructive, that strengthens our families and gives our kids a better future and that celebrates the fact that this is the media center of the world. And we want it to be that way 10, 20, 50 years from now. But we also want to be that way in a country that is less violent, that has a more wholesome environment for our children to grow up in, where our children are strong and taking advantage of the dominant position the United States enjoys in the world media.

Thank you very much.



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**REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT  
ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY IN AMERICA**

**James Madison High School  
Vienna, Virginia  
July 12, 1995**

Thank you, Secretary Riley, for the introduction, but more for your outstanding leadership of the Department of Education and the work you have done not only to increase the investment of our country in education, but also to lift the quality and the standards of education and to deal forthrightly with some of the more difficult, but important issues in education that go to the heart of the character of the young people we build in our country.

Superintendent Spillane, congratulations on your award and the work you are doing here in this district. Dr. Clark, Ms. Lubetkin. To Danny Murphy, I thought he gave such a good speech I could imagine him on a lot of platforms in the years ahead. He did a very fine job.

Mayor Robinson, and to the Board of Supervisors – Chair Katherine Hanley, and to all the religious leaders, parents, students who are here; the teachers, especially the James Madison teachers, thank you for coming today.

Last week at my alma mater, Georgetown, I had a chance to do something that I hope to do more often as President, to have a genuine conversation with the American people about the best way for us to move forward as a nation and to resolve some of the great questions that are nagging at us today. I believe, as I have said repeatedly, that our nation faces two great challenges: First of all, to restore the American dream of opportunity, and the American tradition of responsibility; and second, to bring our country together amidst all of our diversity in a stronger community so that we can find common ground and move forward together.

In my first two years as President I worked harder on the first question: How to get the economy going, how to deal with the specific problems of the country, and how to inspire more responsibility through things like welfare reform and child support enforcement. But I have come to believe that unless we can solve the second problem we'll never really solve the first one. Unless we can find a way to honestly and openly debate our differences and find common ground, to celebrate all the diversity of America and still give people a chance to live in the way they think is right, so that we are stronger for our differences, not weaker, we won't be able to meet the economic and other challenges before us. Therefore, I have decided that I should spend some more time in some conversations about things Americans care a lot about and over which they're deeply divided.

Today I want to talk about a subject that can provoke a fight in nearly any country town or on any city street corner in America – religion. It's a subject that should not drive us apart. And we have a mechanism as old as our Constitution for bringing us together.



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This country, after all, was founded by people of profound faith who mentioned Divine Providence and the guidance of God twice in the Declaration of Independence. They were searching for a place to express their faith freely without persecution. We take it for granted today that that's so in this country, but it was not always so. And it certainly has not always been so across the world. Many of the people who were our first settlers came here primarily because they were looking for a place where they could practice their faith without being persecuted by the government.

Here in Virginia's soil, as the Secretary of Education has said, the oldest and deepest roots of religious liberty can be found. The First Amendment was modeled on Thomas Jefferson's Statutes of Religious Liberty for Virginia. He thought so much of it that he asked that on his gravestone it be said not that he was President, not that he had been Vice President or Secretary of State, but that he was the founder of the University of Virginia, the author of the Declaration of Independence and the author of the Statutes of Religious Liberty for the state of Virginia.

And of course, no one did more than James Madison to put the entire Bill of Rights in our Constitution, and especially, the First Amendment.

Religious freedom is literally our first freedom. It is the first thing mentioned in the Bill of Rights, which opens by saying that Congress cannot make a law that either establishes a religion or restricts the free exercise of religion. Now, as with every provision of our Constitution, that law has had to be interpreted over the years, and it has been in various ways that some of us agree with and some of us disagree with. But one thing is indisputable: the First Amendment has protected our freedom to be religious or not religious, as we choose, with the consequence that in this highly secular age the United States is clearly the most conventionally religious country in the entire world, at least the entire industrialized world.

We have more than 250,000 places of worship. More people go to church here every week, or to synagogue, or to a mosque or other place of worship than in any other country in the world. More people believe religion is directly important to their lives than in any other advanced, industrialized country in the world. And it is not an accident. It is something that has always been a part of our life.

I grew up in Arkansas which is, except for West Virginia, probably the most heavily Southern Baptist Protestant state in the country. But we had two synagogues and a Greek Orthodox church in my hometown. Not so long ago in the heart of our agricultural country in Eastern Arkansas one of our universities did a big outreach to students in the Middle East, and before you knew it, out there on this flat land where there was no building more than two stories high, there rose a great mosque. And all the farmers from miles around drove in to see what the mosque was like and to try and figure out what was going on there.

This is a remarkable country. And I have tried to be faithful to the tradition that we have in the First Amendment. It's something that's very important to me.

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Georgetown is a Jesuit school, a Catholic school. Secretary Riley mentioned that when I was there, all the Catholics were required to take theology, and those of us who weren't Catholic took a course in world religions, which we called Buddhism for Baptists. And I began a sort of love affair with the religions that I did not know anything about before that time.

It's a personal thing to me because of my own religious faith and the faith of my family. I've always felt that in order for me to be free to practice my faith in this country, I had to let other people be as free as possible to practice theirs, and that the government had an extraordinary obligation to bend over backwards not to do anything to impose any set of views on any group of people or to allow others to do so under the cover of law.

That's why one of the proudest things I've been able to do as President was to sign into law the Religious Freedom Restoration Act in 1993. It was designed to reverse the decision of the Supreme Court that essentially made it pretty easy for government, in the pursuit of its legitimate objectives, to restrict the exercise of people's religious liberties. This law basically said - I won't use the legalese - that if the government is going to restrict anybody's legitimate exercise of religion they have to have an extraordinarily good reason and no other way to achieve their compelling objective other than to do this. You have to bend over backwards to avoid getting in the way of people's legitimate exercise of their religious convictions. That's what that law said.

That is the kind of thing I've tried to do throughout my career. When I was governor of Arkansas in the '80s, there were religious leaders going to jail in America because they ran child care centers that they refused to have certified by the state because they said it undermined their ministry. We solved that problem in our state. There were people who were prepared to go to jail over the home schooling issue in the '80s because they said it was part of their religious ministry. We solved that problem in our state.

With the Religious Freedom Restoration Act we made it possible, clearly, in areas that were previously ambiguous for Native Americans, for American Jews, for Muslims to practice the full range of their religious practices when they might have otherwise come in contact with some governmental regulation.

And in a case that was quite important to the Evangelicals in our country, I instructed the Justice Department to change our position after the law passed on a tithing case where a family had been tithing to their church and the man declared bankruptcy, and the government took the position they could go get the money away from the church because he knew he was bankrupt at the time he gave it. And I realized that in some ways that was a close question, but I thought we had to stand up for the proposition that people should be able to practice their religious convictions.

Secretary Riley and I, in another context, have also learned as we have gone along in this work that all the religions obviously share a certain devotion to a certain set of values which make a big difference in the schools. I want to commend Secretary Riley for his relentless support of the so-called character education movement in our schools, which has clearly led in many schools that had great troubles to reduced drop-out rates, increased performance in schools, better citizenship in

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ways that didn't promote any particular religious views but at least unapologetically advocated values shared by all major religions.

One of the reasons I wanted to come here is because I recognize that this work has been done here in this school. There's a course in this school called Combatting Intolerance, which deals not only with racial issues, but also with religious differences, and studies times in the past when people have been killed in mass numbers and persecuted because of their religious convictions.

You can make a compelling argument that the tragic war in Bosnia today is more of a religious war than an ethnic war. The truth is, biologically, there is no difference in the Serbs, the Croats and the Muslims. They are Catholics, Orthodox Christians and Muslims, and they are so for historic reasons. But it's really more of a religious war than an ethnic war when properly viewed. And I think it's very important that the people in this school are learning and, in the process, will come back to the fact that every great religion teaches honesty and trustworthiness and responsibility and devotion to family, and charity and compassion toward others.

Our sense of our own religion and our respect for others has really helped us to work together for two centuries. It's made a big difference in the way we live and the way we function and our ability to overcome adversity. The Constitution wouldn't be what it is without James Madison's religious values. But it's also, frankly, given us a lot of elbow room. I remember, for example, that Abraham Lincoln was derided by his opponents because he belonged to no organized church. But if you read his writings and you study what happened to him, especially after he came to the White House, he might have had more spiritual depth than any person ever to hold the office that I now have the privilege to occupy.

So we have followed this balance, and it has served us well. Now what I want to talk to you about for a minute is that our Founders understood that religious freedom was basically a coin with two sides. The Constitution protected the free exercise of religion, but prohibited the establishment of religion. It's a careful balance that's uniquely American. It is the genius of the First Amendment. It does not, as some people have implied, make us a religion-free country. It has made us the most religious country in the world.

Let's just take the areas of greatest controversy now: All the fights over the past 200 years have been over what those two things mean: What does it mean for the government to establish a religion, and what does it mean for a government to interfere with the free exercise of religion? The Religious Freedom Restoration Act was designed to clarify the second provision - government interfering with the free exercise of religion - and to say you can do that almost never. You can do that almost never.

We have had a lot more fights in the last 30 years over what the government establishment of religion means. And that's what the whole debate is now over the issue of school prayer, religious practices in the schools and things of that kind. I want to talk about it because our schools are the places where so much of our hearts are in America, and where all of our futures are. And I'd like to begin by just pointing out what's going on today and then discussing it if I could. And, again, this is always kind of inflammatory; I want to have a noninflammatory talk about it.

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First of all, let me tell you a little about my personal history. Before the Supreme Court's decision in *Engel* against *Vitale*, which said that the state of New York could not write a prayer that had to be said in every school in New York every day, school prayer was as common as apple pie in my hometown. And when I was in junior high school, it was my responsibility either to start every day by reading the Bible or get somebody else to do it. Needless to say, I exerted a lot of energy in finding someone else to do it from time to time, being a normal 13-year-old boy.

Now, you could say, well, it certainly didn't do any harm; it might have done a little good. But remember what I told you. We had two synagogues in my hometown. We also had pretended to be deeply religious, while there were no blacks in my school because they were in a segregated school. And I can tell you that all of us who were in there doing it never gave a second thought most of the time to the fact that we didn't have blacks in our schools and that there were Jews in the classroom who were probably deeply offended by half the stuff we were saying or doing – or maybe made to feel inferior.

I say that to make the point that we have not become less religious over the last 30 years by saying that schools cannot impose a particular religion, even if it's a Christian religion and 98 percent of the kids in the schools are Christian and Protestant. I'm not sure the Catholics were always comfortable with what we did either. We had a big Catholic population in my school and in my hometown. So I have been a part of this debate we are talking about. This is a part of my personal life experience. I have seen a lot of progress made and I agreed with the Supreme Court's original decision in *Engel v. Vitale*.

Now, since then, I've not always agreed with every decision the Supreme Court made in the area of the First Amendment. I said the other day I didn't agree with the decision concerning the Rabbi who was asked to give the nonsectarian prayer at the commencement. I didn't agree with that because I didn't think it involved any coercion at all. I thought that people were not interfered with, and I didn't think it amounted to the establishment of a religious practice by the government. So I have not always agreed.

But I do believe that on balance, the direction of the First Amendment has been very good for America and has made us the most religious country in the world by keeping the government out of creating religion, supporting particular religions, and interfering with other people's religious practices.

What is giving rise to so much of this debate today I think is two things. One is the feeling that the schools are special and a lot of kids are in trouble, and a lot of kids are in trouble for nonacademic reasons, and we want our kids to have good values and a good future.

Let me give you just one example. Today, there is a new study of drug use among young people being released by the group that Joe Califano was associated with – The Council for a Drug-Free America – It's a massive poll of young people themselves. It's a fascinating study and I urge all of you to get it. Joe came in a couple of days ago and briefed me on it. It shows disturbingly that even though serious drug use is down overall in groups in America, casual drug use is coming back

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up among some of our young people who no longer believe that it's dangerous and have forgotten that's it's wrong and are basically living in a world that I think is very destructive.

And I see it all the time. It's coming back up, even though we're investing money and trying to combat it in education and treatment programs, and supporting things like the DARE program. And we're breaking more drug rings than ever before around the world. It's very disturbing because it's fundamentally something that is kind of creeping back in.

But the study shows that there are three major causes for young people not using drugs. One is they believe that their future depends upon their not doing it; they're optimistic about the future. The more optimistic kids are about the future, the less likely they are to use drugs.

Second is having a strong, positive relationship with their parents. The closer kids are to their parents and the more tuned in to them they are, and the more their parents are good role models, the less likely kids are to use drugs.

You know what the third is? How religious the children are. The more religious the children are, the less likely they are to use drugs.

So what's the big fight over religion in the schools and what does it mean to us and why are people so upset about it? I think there are basically three reasons. One is, most Americans believe that if you're religious, personally religious, you ought to be able to manifest that anywhere at any time, in a public or private place. Second, I think that most Americans are disturbed if they think that our government is becoming anti-religious, instead of adhering to the firm spirit of the First Amendment – don't establish, don't interfere with, but respect. And the third thing is people worry about our national character as manifest in the lives of our children. The crime rate is going down in almost every major area in America today, but the rate of violent random crime among very young people is still going up.

So these questions take on a certain urgency today for personal reasons and for larger social reasons. And this old debate that Madison and Jefferson started over 200 years ago is still being spun out today basically as it relates to what can and cannot be done in our schools, and the whole question, the specific question, of school prayer, although I would argue it goes way beyond that.

So let me tell you what I think the law is and what we're trying to do about it, since I like the First Amendment, and I think we're better off because of it, and I think that if you have two great pillars – the government can't establish and the government can't interfere with – obviously there are going to be a thousand different factual cases that will arise at any given time, and the courts from time to time will make decisions that we don't all agree with, but the question is, are the pillars the right pillars, and do we more or less come out in the right place over the long run.

The Supreme Court is like everybody else, it's imperfect – and so are we. Maybe they're right and we're wrong. But we are going to have these differences. The fundamental balance that has been struck it seems to me has been very good for America, but what is not good today is that people assume that there is a positive-antireligious bias in the cumulative impact of these court

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decisions with which our administration – the Justice Department and the Secretary of Education and the President – strongly disagree. So let me tell you what I think the law is today and what I have instructed the Department of Education and the Department of Justice to do about it.

The First Amendment does not – I will say again – does not convert our schools into religion-free zones. If a student is told he can't wear a yarmulke, for example, we have an obligation to tell the school the law says the student can, most definitely, wear a yarmulke to school. If a student is told she cannot bring a Bible to school, we have to tell the school, no, the law guarantees her the right to bring the Bible to school.

There are those who do believe our schools should be value-neutral and that religion has no place inside the schools. But I think that wrongly interprets the idea of the wall between church and state. They are not the walls of the school.

There are those who say that values and morals and religions have no place in public education; I think that is wrong. First of all, the consequences of having no values are not neutral. The violence in our streets is not value neutral. The movies we see aren't value neutral. Television is not value neutral. Too often we see expressions of human degradation, immorality, violence and debasement of the human soul that have more influence and take more time and occupy more space in the minds of our young people than any of the influences that are felt at school anyway. Our schools, therefore, must be a barricade against this kind of degradation. And we can do it without violating the First Amendment.

I am deeply troubled that so many Americans feel that their faith is threatened by the mechanisms that are designed to protect their faith. Over the past decade we have seen a real rise in these kind of cultural tensions in America. Some people even say we have a culture war. There have been books written about culture war, the culture of disbelief, all these sort of trends arguing that many Americans genuinely feel that a lot of our social problems today have arisen in large measure because the country led by the government has made an assault on religious convictions. That is fueling a lot of this debate today over what can and cannot be done in the schools.

Much of the tension stems from the idea that religion is simply not welcome at all in what Professor Carter at Yale has called the public square. Americans feel that instead of celebrating their love for God in public, they're being forced to hide their faith behind closed doors. That's wrong. Americans should never have to hide their faith. But some Americans have been denied the right to express their religion and that has to stop. That has happened and it has to stop. It is crucial that government does not dictate or demand specific religious views, but equally crucial that government doesn't prevent the expression of specific religious views.

When the First Amendment is invoked as an obstacle to private expression of religion it is being misused. Religion has a proper place in private and a proper place in public because the public square belongs to all Americans. It's especially important that parents feel confident that their children can practice religion. That's why some families have been frustrated to see their children denied even the most private forms of religious expression in public schools. It is rare, but these things have actually happened.

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I know that most schools do a very good job of protecting students' religious rights, but some students in America have been prohibited from reading the Bible silently in study hall. Some student religious groups haven't been allowed to publicize their meetings in the same way that nonreligious groups can. Some students have been prevented even from saying grace before lunch. That is rare, but it has happened and it is wrong. Wherever and whenever the religious rights of children are threatened or suppressed, we must move quickly to correct it. We want to make it easier and more acceptable for people to express and to celebrate their faith.

Now, just because the First Amendment sometimes gets the balance a little bit wrong in specific decisions by specific people doesn't mean there's anything wrong with the First Amendment. I still believe the First Amendment as it is presently written permits the American people to do what they need to do. That's what I believe. Let me give you some examples and you see if you agree.

First of all, the First Amendment does not require students to leave their religion at the schoolhouse door. We wouldn't want students to leave the values they learn from religion, like honesty and sharing and kindness, behind at the schoolhouse door, and reinforcing those values is an important part of every school's mission.

Some school officials and teachers and parents believe that the Constitution forbids any religious expression at all in public schools. That is wrong. Our courts have made it clear that that is wrong. It is also not a good idea. Religion is too important to our history and our heritage for us to keep it out of our schools. Once again, it shouldn't be demanded, but as long as it is not sponsored by school officials and doesn't interfere with other children's rights, it must not be denied.

For example, students can pray privately and individually whenever they want. They can say grace themselves before lunch. There are times when they can pray out loud together. Student religious clubs in high schools can and should be treated just like any other extracurricular club. They can advertise their meetings, meet on school grounds, use school facilities just as other clubs can. When students can choose to read a book to themselves, they have every right to read the Bible or any other religious text they want.

Teachers can and certainly should teach about religion and the contributions it has made to our history, our values, our knowledge, to our music and our art in our country and around the world, and to the development of the kind of people we are. Students can also pray to themselves -- preferably before tests, as I used to do.

Students should feel free to express their religion and their beliefs in homework, through art work and during class presentations, as long as it's relevant to the assignment. If students can distribute flyers or pamphlets that have nothing to do with the school, they can distribute religious flyers and pamphlets on the same basis. If students can wear T-shirts advertising sports teams, rock groups or politicians, they can also wear T-shirts that promote religion.

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If certain subjects or activities are objectionable to their students or their parents because of their religious beliefs, then schools may, and sometimes they must, excuse the students from those activities.

Finally, even though the schools can't advocate religious beliefs, as I said earlier, they should teach mainstream values and virtues. The fact that some of these values happen to be religious values does not mean that they cannot be taught in our schools.

All these forms of religious expression and worship are permitted and protected by the First Amendment. That doesn't change the fact that some students haven't been allowed to express their beliefs in these ways. What we have to do is to work together to help all Americans understand exactly what the First Amendment does. It protects freedom of religion by allowing students to pray, and it protects freedom of religion by preventing schools from telling them how and when and what to pray. The First Amendment keeps us all on common ground. We are allowed to believe and worship as we choose without the government telling any of us what we can and cannot do.

It is in that spirit that I am today directing the Secretary of Education and the Attorney General to provide every school district in America before school starts this fall with a detailed explanation of the religious expression permitted in schools, including all the things that I've talked about today. I hope parents, students, educators and religious leaders can use this directive as a starting point. I hope it helps them to understand their differences, to protect student's religious rights, and to find common ground. I believe we can find that common ground.

This past April a broad coalition of religious and legal groups - Christian and Jewish, conservative and liberal, Supreme Court advocates and Supreme Court critics - put themselves on the solution side of this debate. They produced a remarkable document called "Religion in Public Schools: A Joint Statement of Current Law." They put aside their deep differences and said, we all agree on what kind of religious expression the law permits in our schools. My directive borrows heavily and gratefully from their wise and thoughtful statement. This is a subject that could have easily divided the men and women that came together to discuss it. But they moved beyond their differences and that may be as important as the specific document they produced.

I also want to mention over 200 religious and civic leaders who signed the Williamsburg Charter in Virginia in 1988. That charter reaffirms the core principles of the First Amendment. We can live together with our deepest differences and all be stronger for it.

The charter signers are impressive in their own right and all the more impressive for their differences of opinion, including Presidents Ford and Carter; Chief Justice Rehnquist and the late Chief Justice Burger; Senator Dole and former Governor Dukakis; Bill Bennett and Lane Kirkland, the president of the AFL-CIO; Norman Lear and Phyllis Schlafly signed it together; Coretta Scott King and Reverend James Dobson.

These people were able to stand up publicly because religion is a personal and private thing for Americans which has to have some public expression. That's how it is for me.

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I'm pretty old-fashioned about these things. I really do believe in the constancy of sin and the constant possibility of forgiveness, the reality of redemption and the promise of a future life. But I'm also a Baptist who believes that salvation is primarily personal and private, and that my relationship is directly with God and not through any intermediary.

Other people can have different views. And I've spent a good part of my life trying to understand different religious views, celebrate them and figure out what brings us together.

I will say again, the First Amendment is a gift to us. And the Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution in broad ways so that it could grow and change, but hold fast to certain principles. They knew that all people were fallible and would make mistakes from time to time. As I said, there are times when the Supreme Court makes a decision, and if I disagree with it, one of us is wrong. There's another possibility: both of us could be wrong. That's the way it is in human affairs.

But what I want to say to the American people and what I want to say to you is that James Madison and Thomas Jefferson did not intend to drive a stake in the heart of religion and to drive it out of our public life. What they intended to do was to set up a system so that we could bring religion into our public life and into our private life without any of us telling the other what to do.

This is a big deal today. One county in America, Los Angeles County, has over 150 different racial and ethnic groups in it – over 150 different ones. How many religious views do you suppose are in those groups? How many? Every significant religion in the world is represented in significant numbers in one American county, as are many smaller religious groups – all in one American county.

We have got to get this right. We have got to get this right. And we have to keep this balance. This country needs to be a place where religion grows and flourishes.

Don't you believe that if every kid in every difficult neighborhood in America were in a religious institution on the weekends, the synagogue on Saturday, a church on Sunday, a mosque on Friday, don't you really believe that the drug rate, the crime rate, the violence rate, the sense of self-destruction would go way down and the quality of the character of this country would go way up?

But don't you also believe that if for the last 200 years we had had a state governed religion, people would be bored with it, and they would think it had been compromised by politicians, shaved around the edges, imposed on them by people who didn't really conform to it, and we wouldn't have 250,000 houses of worship in America? I mean, we wouldn't.

It may be imperfect, the First Amendment, but it is the nearest thing ever created in any human society for the promotion of religion and religious values because it left us free to do it. And I strongly believe that the government has made a lot of mistakes which we have tried to roll back in interfering with that around the edges. That's what the Religious Freedom Restoration Act is all about. That's what this directive that Secretary Riley and the Justice Department and I have

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worked so hard on is all about. That's what our efforts to bring in people of different religious views are all about. And I strongly believe that we have erred when we have rolled it back too much.

And I hope that we can have a partnership with our churches in many ways to reach out to the young people who need the values, the hope, the belief, the convictions that come with faith, and the sense of security in a very uncertain and rapidly changing world.

But keep in mind we have a chance to do it because of the heritage of America and the protection of the First Amendment. We have to get it right.

Thank you very much.

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## REMARKS BY THE PRESIDENT ON AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

National Archives  
July 19, 1995

My fellow Americans: In recent weeks I have begun a conversation with the American people about our fate and our duty to prepare our nation not only to meet the new century, but to live and lead in a world transformed to a degree seldom seen in all of our history. Much of this change is good, but it is not all good, and all of us are affected by it. Therefore, we must reach beyond our fears and our divisions to a new time of great and common purpose.

Our challenge is twofold: first, to restore the American dream of opportunity and the American value of responsibility; and second, to bring our country together amid all our diversity into a stronger community, so that we can find common ground and move forward as one.

More than ever these two endeavors are inseparable. I am absolutely convinced we cannot restore economic opportunity or solve our social problems unless we find a way to bring the American people together. To bring our people together we must openly and honestly deal with the issues that divide us. Today I want to discuss one of those issues: affirmative action.

It is, in a way, ironic that this issue should be divisive today, because affirmative action began 25 years ago by a Republican president with bipartisan support. It began simply as a means to an end of enduring national purpose – equal opportunity for all Americans.

So let us today trace the roots of affirmative action in our never-ending search for equal opportunity. Let us determine what it is and what it isn't. Let us see where it's worked and where it hasn't, and ask ourselves what we need to do now. Along the way, let us remember always that finding common ground as we move toward the 21st century depends fundamentally on our shared commitment to equal opportunity for all Americans. It is a moral imperative, a constitutional mandate, and a legal necessity.

There could be no better place for this discussion than the National Archives, for within these walls are America's bedrocks of our common ground – the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights. No paper is as lasting as the words these documents contain. So we put them in these special cases to protect the parchment from the elements. No building is as solid as the principles these documents embody, but we sure tried to build one with these metal doors 11 inches thick to keep them safe, for these documents are America's only crown jewels. But the best place of all to hold these words and these principles is the one place in which they can never fade and never grow old – in the stronger chambers of our hearts.

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Beyond all else, our country is a set of convictions: We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Our whole history can be seen first as an effort to preserve these rights, and then as an effort to make them real in the lives of all our citizens. We know that from the beginning, there was a great gap between the plain meaning of our creed and the meaner reality of our daily lives. Back then, only white male property owners could vote. Black slaves were not even counted as whole people, and Native Americans were regarded as little more than an obstacle to our great national progress. No wonder Thomas Jefferson, reflecting on slavery, said he trembled to think God is just.

On the 200th anniversary of our great Constitution, Justice Thurgood Marshall, the grandson of a slave, said, "The government our founders devised was defective from the start, requiring several amendments, a civil war, and momentous social transformation to attain the system of constitutional government and its respect for the individual freedoms and human rights we hold as fundamental today."

Emancipation, women's suffrage, civil rights, voting rights, equal rights, the struggle for the rights of the disabled—all these and other struggles are milestones on America's often rocky, but fundamentally righteous journey to close the gap between the ideals enshrined in these treasures here in the National Archives and the reality of our daily lives.

I first came to this very spot where I'm standing today 32 years ago this month. I was a 16-year-old delegate to the American Legion Boys Nation. Now, that summer was a high-water mark for our national journey. That was the summer that President Kennedy ordered Alabama National Guardsmen to enforce a court order to allow two young blacks to enter the University of Alabama. As he told our nation, "Every American ought to have the right to be treated as he would wish to be treated; as one would wish his children to be treated."

Later that same summer, on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial, Martin Luther King told Americans of his dream that one day the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slaveowners would sit down together at the table of brotherhood; that one day his four little children would be judged not by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. His words captured the hearts and steeled the wills of millions of Americans. Some of them sang with him in the hot sun that day. Millions more like me listened and wept in the privacy of their homes.

It's hard to believe where we were just three decades ago. When I came up here to Boys Nation and we had this mock congressional session I was one of only three or four southerners who would even vote for the civil rights plank. That's largely because of my family. My grandfather had a grade school education and ran a grocery store across the street from the cemetery in Hope, Arkansas, where my parents and my grandparents are buried. Most of his customers were black, were poor, and were working people. As a child in that store I saw that people of different races could treat each other with respect and dignity.



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But I also saw that the black neighborhood across the street was the only one in town where the streets weren't paved. And when I returned to that neighborhood in the late '60s to see a woman who had cared for me as a toddler, the streets still weren't paved. A lot of you know that I am an ardent movie-goer. As a child I never went to a movie where I could sit next to a black American. They were always sitting upstairs.

In the 1960s, believe it or not, there were still a few courthouse squares in my state where the rest rooms were marked "white" and "colored." I graduated from a segregated high school seven years after President Eisenhower integrated Little Rock Central High School. And when President Kennedy barely carried my home state in 1960, the poll tax system was still alive and well there.

Even though my grandparents were in a minority, being poor, Southern whites who were pro-civil rights, I think most other people knew better than to think the way they did. And those who were smart enough to act differently, discovered a lesson that we ought to remember today: Discrimination is not just morally wrong, it hurts everybody.

In 1960, Atlanta, Georgia, in reaction to all the things that were going on all across the South, adopted the motto, "The city too busy to hate." And however imperfectly over the years, they tried to live by it. I am convinced that Atlanta's success – it now is home to more foreign corporations than any other American city, and one year from today it will begin to host the Olympics – that that success all began when people got too busy to hate.

The lesson we learned was a hard one. When we allow people to pit us against one another or spend energy denying opportunity based on our differences, everyone is held back. But when we give all Americans a chance to develop and use their talents, to be full partners in our common enterprise, then everybody is pushed forward.

My experiences with discrimination are rooted in the South and in the legacy slavery left. I also lived with a working mother and a working grandmother when women's work was far rarer and far more circumscribed than it is today. But we all know there are millions of other stories – those of Hispanics, Asian Americans, Native Americans, people with disabilities, others against whom fingers have been pointed. Many of you have your own stories, and that's why you're here today – people who were denied the right to develop and use their full human potential. And their progress, too, is a part of our journey to make the reality of America consistent with the principles just behind me here.

Thirty years ago in this city, you didn't see many people of color or women making their way to work in the morning in business clothes, or serving in substantial numbers in powerful positions in Congress or at the White House, or making executive decisions every day in businesses. In fact, even the employment want ads were divided, men on one side and women on the other.

It was extraordinary then to see women or people of color as television news anchors, or, believe it or not, even in college sports. There were far fewer women or minorities as job

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supervisors, or firefighters, or police officers, or doctors, or lawyers, or college professors, or in many other jobs that offer stability and honor and integrity to family life.

A lot has changed, and it did not happen as some sort of random evolutionary drift. It took hard work and sacrifices and countless acts of courage and conscience by millions of Americans. It took the political courage and statesmanship of Democrats and Republicans alike, the vigilance and compassion of courts and advocates in and out of government committed to the Constitution and to equal protection and to equal opportunity. It took the leadership of people in business who knew that in the end we would all be better. It took the leadership of people in labor unions who knew that working people had to be reconciled.

Some people, like Congressman Lewis there, put their lives on the line. Other people lost their lives. And millions of Americans changed their own lives and put hate behind them. As a result, today all our lives are better. Women have become a major force in business and political life, and far more able to contribute to their families' incomes. A true and growing black middle class has emerged. Higher education has literally been revolutionized, with women and racial and ethnic minorities attending once overwhelmingly white and sometimes all male schools.

In communities across our nation police departments now better reflect the make-up of those whom they protect. A generation of professionals now serve as role models for young women and minority youth. Hispanics and newer immigrant populations are succeeding in making America stronger.

For an example of where the best of our future lies just think about our space program and the stunning hook-up with the Russian space station this month. Let's remember that that program, the world's finest, began with heroes like Alan Shepard and Senator John Glenn, but today it's had American heroes like Sally Ride, Ellen Ochoa, Leroy Child, Guy Bluford and other outstanding, completely qualified women and minorities.

How did this happen? Fundamentally, because we opened our hearts and minds and changed our ways. But not without pressure – the pressure of court decisions, legislation, executive action, and the power of examples in the public and private sector. Along the way we learned that laws alone do not change society; that old habits and thinking patterns are deeply ingrained and die hard; that more is required to really open the doors of opportunity. Our search to find ways to move more quickly to equal opportunity led to the development of what we now call affirmative action.

The purpose of affirmative action is to give our nation a way to finally address the systemic exclusion of individuals of talent on the basis of their gender or race from opportunities to develop, perform, achieve and contribute. Affirmative action is an effort to develop a systematic approach to open the doors of education, employment and business development opportunities to qualified individuals who happen to be members of groups that have experienced longstanding and persistent discrimination.

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It is a policy that grew out of many years of trying to navigate between two unacceptable pasts. One was to say simply that we declared discrimination illegal and that's enough. We saw that that way still relegated blacks with college degrees to jobs as railroad porters, and kept women with degrees under a glass ceiling with a lower paycheck.

The other path was simply to try to impose change by leveling draconian penalties on employers who didn't meet certain imposed, ultimately arbitrary, and sometimes unachievable quotas. That, too, was rejected out of a sense of fairness.

So a middle ground was developed that would change an inequitable status quo gradually, but firmly, by building the pool of qualified applicants for college, for contracts, for jobs, and giving more people the chance to learn, work and earn. When affirmative action is done right, it is flexible, it is fair, and it works.

I know some people are honestly concerned about the times affirmative action doesn't work, when it's done in the wrong way. And I know there are times when some employers don't use it in the right way. They may cut corners and treat a flexible goal as a quota. They may give opportunities to people who are unqualified instead of those who deserve it. They may, in so doing, allow a different kind of discrimination. When this happens, it is also wrong. But it isn't affirmative action, and it is not legal.

So when our administration finds cases of that sort, we will enforce the law aggressively. The Justice Department files hundreds of cases every year, attacking discrimination in employment, including suits on behalf of white males. Most of these suits, however, affect women and minorities for a simple reason - because the vast majority of discrimination in America is still discrimination against them. But the law does require fairness for everyone and we are determined to see that that is exactly what the law delivers.

Let me be clear about what affirmative action must not mean and what I won't allow it to be. It does not mean - and I don't favor - the unjustified preference of the unqualified over the qualified of any race or gender. It doesn't mean - and I don't favor - numerical quotas. It doesn't mean - and I don't favor - rejection or selection of any employee or student solely on the basis of race or gender without regard to merit.

Like many business executives and public servants, I owe it to you to say that my views on this subject are, more than anything else, the product of my personal experience. I have had experience with affirmative action, nearly 20 years of it now, and I know it works.

When I was Attorney General of my home state, I hired a record number of women and African American lawyers - every one clearly qualified and exceptionally hardworking. As Governor, I appointed more women to my Cabinet and state boards than any other governor in the state's history, and more African Americans than all the governors in the state's history combined. And no one ever questioned their qualifications or performance. And our state was better and stronger because of their service.



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As President, I am proud to have the most diverse administration in history in my Cabinet, my agencies and my staff. And I must say, I have been surprised at the criticism I have received from some quarters in my determination to achieve this.

In the last two and a half years, the most outstanding example of affirmative action in the United States, the Pentagon, has opened 260,000 positions for women who serve in our Armed Forces. I have appointed more women and minorities to the federal bench than any other president, more than the last two combined. And yet, far more of our judicial appointments have received the highest rating from the American Bar Association than any other administration since those ratings have been given.

In our administration many government agencies are doing more business with qualified firms run by minorities and women. The Small Business Administration has reduced its budget by 40 percent, doubled its loan outputs, dramatically increased the number of loans to women and minority small business people, without reducing the number of loans to white businessowners who happen to be male, and without changing the loan standards for a single, solitary application. Quality and diversity can go hand in hand, and they must.

Let me say that affirmative action has also done more than just open the doors of opportunity to individual Americans. Most economists who study it agree that affirmative action has also been an important part of closing gaps in economic opportunity in our society, thereby strengthening the entire economy.

A group of distinguished business leaders told me just a couple of days ago that their companies are stronger and their profits are larger because of the diversity and the excellence of their work forces achieved through intelligent and fair affirmative action programs. And they said we have gone far beyond anything the government might require us to do because managing diversity and individual opportunity and being fair to everybody is the key to our future economic success in the global marketplace.

Now, there are those who say, my fellow Americans, that even good affirmative action programs are no longer needed; that it should be enough to resort to the courts or the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission in cases of actual, provable, individual discrimination because there is no longer any systematic discrimination in our society. In deciding how to answer that let us consider the facts.

The unemployment rate for African Americans remains about twice that of whites. The Hispanic rate is still much higher. Women have narrowed the earnings gap, but still make only 72 percent as much as men do for comparable jobs. The average income for an Hispanic woman with a college degree is still less than the average income of a white man with a high school diploma.

According to the recently completed Glass Ceiling Report, sponsored by Republican members of Congress, in the nation's largest companies only six-tenths of one percent of senior management positions are held by African Americans, four-tenths of a percent by Hispanic

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Americans, three-tenths of a percent by Asian Americans; women hold between three and five percent of these positions. White males make up 43 percent of our work force, but hold 95 percent of these jobs.

Just last week, the Chicago Federal Reserve Bank reported that black home loan applicants are more than twice as likely to be denied credit as whites with the same qualifications; and that Hispanic applicants are more than one and a half times as likely to be denied loans as whites with the same qualifications.

Last year alone the federal government received more than 90,000 complaints of employment discrimination based on race, ethnicity or gender. Less than three percent were for reverse discrimination.

Evidence abounds in other ways of the persistence of the kind of bigotry that can affect the way we think even if we're not conscious of it, in hiring and promotion and business and educational decisions.

Crimes and violence based on hate against Asians, Hispanics, African Americans and other minorities are still with us. And, I'm sorry to say, that the worst and most recent evidence of this involves a recent report of federal law enforcement officials in Tennessee attending an event literally overflowing with racism -- a sickening reminder of just how pervasive these kinds of attitudes still are.

By the way, I want to tell you that I am committed to finding the truth about what happened there and to taking appropriate action. And I want to say that if anybody who works in federal law enforcement thinks that that kind of behavior is acceptable, they ought to think about working someplace else.

Now, let's get to the other side of the argument. If affirmative action has worked and if there is evidence that discrimination still exists on a wide scale in ways that are conscious and unconscious, then why should we get rid of it as many people are urging? Some question the effectiveness or the fairness of particular affirmative action programs. I say to all of you, those are fair questions, and they prompted the review of our affirmative action programs, about which I will talk in a few moments.

Some question the fundamental purpose of the effort. There are people who honestly believe that affirmative action always amounts to group preferences over individual merit; that affirmative action always leads to reverse discrimination; that ultimately, therefore, it demeans those who benefit from it and discriminates against those who are not helped by it.

I just have to tell you that all of you have to decide how you feel about that, and all of our fellow countrymen and women have to decide as well. But I believe if there are no quotas, if we give no opportunities to unqualified people, if we have no reverse discrimination, and if, when the problem ends, the program ends, that criticism is wrong. That's what I believe. But we should have this debate and everyone should ask the question.

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Now let's deal with what I really think is behind so much of this debate today. There are a lot of people who oppose affirmative action today who supported it for a very long time. I believe they are responding to the sea change in the experiences that most Americans have in the world in which we live.

If you say now you're against affirmative action because the government is using its power or the private sector is using its power to help minorities at the expense of the majority, that gives you a way of explaining away the economic distress that a majority of Americans honestly feel. It gives you a way of turning their resentment against the minorities or against a particular government program, instead of having an honest debate about how we all got into the fix we're in and what we're all going to do together to get out of it.

That explanation, the affirmative action explanation for the fix we're in is just wrong. It is just wrong. Affirmative action did not cause the great economic problems of the American middle class. And because most minorities or women are either members of that middle class or people who are poor who are struggling to get into it, we must also admit that affirmative action alone won't solve the problems of minorities and women who seek to be a part of the American Dream. To do that, we have to have an economic strategy that reverses the decline in wages and the growth of poverty among working people. Without that, women, minorities, and white males will all be in trouble in the future.

But it is wrong to use the anxieties of the middle class to divert the American people from the real causes of their economic distress – the sweeping historic changes taking all the globe in its path, and the specific policies or lack of them in our own country which have aggravated those challenges. It is simply wrong to play politics with the issue of affirmative action and divide our country at a time when, if we're really going to change things, we have to be united.

I must say, I think it is ironic that some of those – not all, but some of those who call for an end to affirmative action also advocate policies which will make the real economic problems of the anxious middle class even worse. They talk about opportunity and being for equal opportunity for everyone, and then they reduce investment in equal opportunity on an evenhanded basis. For example, if the real goal is economic opportunity for all Americans, why in the world would we reduce our investment in education from Head Start to affordable college loans? Why don't we make college loans available to every American instead?

If the real goal is empowering all middle class Americans and empowering poor people to work their way into the middle class without regard to race or gender, why in the world would the people who advocate that turn around and raise taxes on our poorest working families, or reduce the money available for education and training when they lose their jobs or they're living on poverty wages, or increase the cost of housing for lower-income, working people with children?

Why would we do that? If we're going to empower America, we have to do more than talk about it, we have to do it. And we surely have learned that we cannot empower all Americans by a simple strategy of taking opportunity away from some Americans.

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So to those who use this as a political strategy to divide us, we must say, no. We must say, no. But to those who raise legitimate questions about the way affirmative action works, or who raise the larger question about the genuine problems and anxieties of all the American people and their sense of being left behind and treated unfairly, we must say, yes, you are entitled to answers to your questions. We must say yes to that.

Now, that's why I ordered this review of all of our affirmative action programs; a review to look at the facts, not the politics of affirmative action. This review concluded that affirmative action remains a useful tool for widening economic and educational opportunity. The model used by the military, the Army in particular – and I'm delighted to have the Commanding General of the Army here today because he set such a fine example – has been especially successful because it emphasizes education and training, ensuring that it has a wide pool of qualified candidates for every level of promotion. That approach has given us the most racially diverse and best-qualified military in our history. There are more opportunities for women and minorities there than ever before. And now there are over 50 generals and admirals who are Hispanic, Asian or African Americans.

We found that the Education Department had programs targeted on under-represented minorities that do a great deal of good with the tiniest of investments. We found that these programs comprised 40 cents of every \$1,000 in the Education Department's budget.

Now, college presidents will tell you that the education their schools offer actually benefit from diversity; colleges where young people get the education and make the personal and professional contacts that will shape their lives. If their colleges look like the world they're going to live and work in, and they learn from all different kinds of people things that they can't learn in books, our systems of higher education are stronger.

Still, I believe every child needs the chance to go to college. Every child. That means every child has to have a chance to get affordable and repayable college loans, Pell Grants for poor kids and a chance to do things like join AmeriCorps and work their way through school. Every child is entitled to that. That is not an argument against affirmative action, it's an argument for more opportunity for more Americans until everyone is reached.

As I said a moment ago, the review found that the Small Business Administration last year increased loans to minorities by over two-thirds, loans to women by over 80 percent, did not decrease loans to white men, and not a single loan went to a unqualified person. People who never had a chance before to be part of the American system of free enterprise now have it. No one was hurt in the process. That made America stronger.

This review also found that the executive order on employment practices of large federal contractors also has helped to bring more fairness and inclusion into the work force.

Since President Nixon was here in my job, America has used goals and timetables to preserve opportunity and to prevent discrimination, to urge businesses to set higher expectations for themselves and to realize those expectations. But we did not and we will not use rigid quotas to mandate outcomes.

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We also looked at the way we award procurement contracts under the programs known as set-asides. There's no question that these programs have helped to build up firms owned by minorities and women, who historically had been excluded from the old-boy networks in these areas. It has helped a new generation of entrepreneurs to flourish, opening new paths to self-reliance and an economic growth in which all of us ultimately share. Because of the set-asides, businesses ready to compete have had a chance to compete, a chance they would not have otherwise had.

But as with any government program, set-asides can be misapplied, misused, even intentionally abused. There are critics who exploit that fact as an excuse to abolish all these programs, regardless of their effects. I believe they are wrong, but I also believe, based on our factual review, we clearly need some reform. So first, we should crack down on those who take advantage of everyone else through fraud and abuse. We must crack down on fronts and pass-throughs, people who pretend to be eligible for these programs and aren't. That is wrong.

We also, in offering new businesses a leg up, must make sure that the set-asides go to businesses that need them most. We must really look and make sure that our standard for eligibility is fair and defensible. We have to tighten the requirement to move businesses out of programs once they've had a fair opportunity to compete. The graduation requirement must mean something - it must mean graduation. There should be no permanent set-aside for any company.

Second, we must, and we will, comply with the Supreme Court's Adarand decision of last month. Now, in particular, that means focusing set-aside programs on particular regions and business sectors where the problems of discrimination or exclusion are provable and are clearly requiring affirmative action. I have directed the Attorney General and the agencies to move forward with compliance with Adarand expeditiously.

But I also want to emphasize that the Adarand decision did not dismantle affirmative action and did not dismantle set-asides. In fact, while setting stricter standards to mandate reform of affirmative action, it actually reaffirmed the need for affirmative action and reaffirmed the continuing existence of systematic discrimination in the United States.

What the Supreme Court ordered the federal government to do was to meet the same more rigorous standard for affirmative action programs that state and local governments were ordered to meet several years ago. And the best set-aside programs under that standard have been challenged and have survived.

Third, beyond discrimination we need to do more to help disadvantaged people and distressed communities, no matter what their race or gender. There are places in our country where the free enterprise system simply doesn't reach. It simply isn't working to provide jobs and opportunity. Disproportionately, these areas in urban and rural America are highly populated by racial minorities, but not entirely. To make this initiative work, I believe the government must become a better partner for people in places in urban and rural America that are caught in a cycle of poverty. And I believe we have to find ways to get the private sector to assume their rightful role as a driver of economic growth.

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It has always amazed me that we have given incentives to our business people to help to develop poor economies in other parts of the world, our neighbors in the Caribbean, our neighbors in other parts of the world - I have supported this when not subject to their own abuses - but we ignore the biggest source of economic growth available to the American economy, the poor economies isolated within the United States of America.

There are those who say, well, even if we made the jobs available people wouldn't work. They haven't tried. Most of the people in disadvantaged communities work today, and most of them who don't work have a very strong desire to do so. In central Harlem, 14 people apply for every single minimum-wage job opening. Think how many more would apply if there were good jobs with a good future. Our job is to connect disadvantaged people and disadvantaged communities to economic opportunity so that everybody who wants to work can do so.

We've been working at this through our empowerment zones and community development banks, through the initiatives of Secretary Cisneros of the Housing and Urban Development Department and many other things that we have tried to do to put capital where it is needed. And now I have asked Vice President Gore to develop a proposal to use our contracting to support businesses that locate themselves in these distressed areas or hire a large percentage of their workers from these areas - not to substitute for what we're doing in affirmative action, but to supplement it, to go beyond it, to do something that will help to deal with the economic crisis of America. We want to make our procurement system more responsive to people in these areas who need help.

My fellow Americans, affirmative action has to be made consistent with our highest ideals of personal responsibility and merit, and our urgent need to find common ground, and to prepare all Americans to compete in the global economy of the next century.

Today, I am directing all our agencies to comply with the Supreme Court's Adarand decision, and also to apply the four standards of fairness to all our affirmative action programs that I have already articulated: No quotas in theory or practice; no illegal discrimination of any kind, including reverse discrimination; no preference for people who are not qualified for any job or other opportunity; and as soon as a program has succeeded, it must be retired. Any program that doesn't meet these four principles must be eliminated or reformed to meet them.

But let me be clear: Affirmative action has been good for America.

Affirmative action has not always been perfect, and affirmative action should not go on forever. It should be changed now to take care of those things that are wrong, and it should be retired when its job is done. I am resolved that that day will come. But the evidence suggests, indeed, screams that that day has not come.

The job of ending discrimination in this country is not over. That should not be surprising. We had slavery for centuries before the passage of the 13th, 14th and 15th Amendments. We waited another hundred years for the civil rights legislation. Women have had the vote less than a hundred years. We have always had difficulty with these things, as most societies do. But we are making more progress than many people.

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Based on the evidence, the job is not done. So here is what I think we should do. We should reaffirm the principle of affirmative action and fix the practices. We should have a simple slogan: Mend it, but don't end it.

Let me ask all Americans, whether they agree or disagree with what I have said today, to see this issue in the larger context of our times. President Lincoln said, we cannot escape our history. We cannot escape our future, either. And that future must be one in which every American has the chance to live up to his or her God-given capacities.

The new technology, the instant communications, the explosion of global commerce have created enormous opportunities and enormous anxieties for Americans. In the last two and a half years, we have seen seven million new jobs, more millionaires and new businesses than ever before, high corporate profits, and a booming stock market. Yet, most Americans are working harder for the same or lower pay. And they feel more insecurity about their jobs, their retirement, their health care, and their children's education. Too many of our children are clearly exposed to poverty and welfare, violence and drugs.

These are the great challenges for our whole country on the homefront at the dawn of the 21st century. We've got to find the wisdom and the will to create family-wage jobs for all the people who want to work; to open the door of college to all Americans; to strengthen families and reduce the awful problems to which our children are exposed; to move poor Americans from welfare to work.

This is the work of our administration - to give the people the tools they need to make the most of their own lives, to give families and communities the tools they need to solve their own problems. But let us not forget affirmative action didn't cause these problems. And getting rid of affirmative action certainly won't solve them.

If properly done, affirmative action can help us come together, go forward and grow together. It is in our moral, legal and practical interest to see that every person can make the most of his life. In the fight for the future, we need all hands on deck and some of those hands still need a helping hand.

In our national community we're all different, we're all the same. We want liberty and freedom. We want the embrace of family and community. We want to make the most of our own lives and we're determined to give our children a better one. Today there are voices of division who would say forget all that. Don't you dare. Remember we're still closing the gap between our founders' ideals and our reality. But every step along the way has made us richer, stronger and better. And the best is yet to come.

Thank you very much, and God bless you.

**END**

**12-13-99**